

THE NETHERLANDS

Early Childhood Education and Care ECEC Workforce Profile

Country report authors

Elly Singert

Formerly Faculty of Education, University of Amsterdam;
Department of Developmental Psychology, Utrecht University

Bodine Romijn

Department of Development and Education of Youth in Diverse Societies (DEEDS),
Utrecht University

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Ruben Fukkink, University of Amsterdam

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Glossary

EQF – *European Qualifications Framework*

Outcomes based (knowledge, skills, competences), eight-level reference tool to enable qualification comparisons between countries.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/events-and-projects/projects/european-qualifications-framework-eqf>

ECTS – *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*

A system for enhancing student mobility through the Europe-wide recognition of credit transfers and credit accumulation in higher education

https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources-and-tools/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system-ects_en

ISCED – *International Standard Classification of Education*

An instrument for comparing levels and fields of education across countries, developed by UNESCO in the 1970s and revised in 1997 and 2011.

<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

About the authors

Elly Singer[†], PhD, was an associate professor at Utrecht University and the University of Amsterdam. She was the project leader and co-author of the Dutch pedagogical framework for ECEC and for Diversity in childcare settings for 0–13 year-olds. She was a member of the board of trustees of the European Early Childhood Education Research Association. She and her co-workers published widely in peer-reviewed international journals on play engagement, social learning, humour, language development, friendship and group dynamics.

Bodine Romijn, PhD, is an assistant professor at the Department of Development and Education of Youth in Diverse Societies (DEEDS) at Utrecht University. Her work focuses on equality, diversity and inclusion in early childhood and primary education. She studies professionals' intercultural competences and the role organisations play in supporting and facilitating staff in implementing culturally sensitive and inclusive practices. Currently, she is involved in the Dutch National Child Care Monitor (LKK) funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

1. ECEC governance in The Netherlands

Historically, the Dutch childcare context is characterised by a ‘split system’ with two separate sectors for young children, namely, childcare and education, each with its own pedagogical roots (see Bahle 2009; Bennett and Tayler 2006; Singer 2018). Nowadays, the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system is partially unified with the involvement of two ministries.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid – SZW*) is responsible for the governance of childcare at the national level (ECEC settings for children 0–3¹ years; after school care, 4–13 years; and home-based childcare, 0–13 years)². The same ministry provides financial support for the costs of childcare to parents that need childcare because of work or study. The childcare sector is organised by private companies.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (*Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap – OCW*) is responsible for the governance of early education programmes for children from 2½ up to 4 years (*vroeg- en voorschoolse educatie*) and for primary education (*Basisschool*). Primary education starts for most children in the Netherlands at the age of 4 and is compulsory from the age of 5. The Ministry of Education gives financial support to the local authorities, which have to provide at least 16 hours (usually taken on four half-days) of early education per week for children between 2½ and 4 years with non-working and working parents. These local governments have some policy space by making extra funds available for specific categories of disadvantaged children. These categories are defined at the municipal level and generally take into account parental income, education level and migration status.

Coordination, cooperation and integration of the originally split systems of child care and early education have become a matter of urgency. Since the implementation of laws to stimulate child development and quality promotion in 2010 and 2018 (Development opportunities through quality and education, OKE Act – *Ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie, Wet OKE*), and the Childcare Innovation and Quality Act, IKK Act – *Wet Innovatie and Kwaliteit Kinderopvang, Wet IKK, 2018*), both sectors are partly covered by the same laws and regulations for quality and inspection (Veen, Van Daalen, and Blok 2014; SZW 2020). But the financial regulations are still different. Childcare centres often have to take into account two financial systems – SZW, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (*Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid*), from 2022 renamed "Netherlands Labour Authority" (*Nederlandse Arbeidsinspectie*) and OCW, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science *Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* – as well as two systems of inspection of quality. Moreover, there are differences in educational goals. The childcare sector is focused on child well-being and is legally required to comply with four broad pedagogic objectives: the childcare facility must offer children a safe and caring environment that promotes personal competence, strengthens social competence and transmits norms and values (see Riksen-Walraven 2004). No specific references are made to cognitive development and stimulation of development to prepare for primary education. The inspection agencies of childcare centres are part of the municipal public health services and located at the

¹ **Editors’ note:** International data sources use varying ways of presenting the age range of children enrolled in ECEC settings. For the SEEPRO-3 reports we have chosen the following age-inclusive format: **0–2** years for settings for children **up to** 3 years of age and **3–5** years for pre-primary settings in countries with a primary school entry age of 6 years. In the Netherlands the corresponding formats are **0–3** and **4–5**.

² Although this age range reflects the legal basis, in reality – since most children start primary school at age 4 – the overwhelming majority of children finishes at age 12. Those who finish later have usually just turned 13 after a repetition year at school due to poor performance.

level of the municipalities. The inspections are conducted at least annually, during which the childcare inspectors assess whether or not childcare centres meet the national quality requirements as stated in The Dutch Childcare Act (2005).

The goals of early education programmes are also broad, but more focused on cognitive development and language, especially in the case of stimulation programmes for disadvantaged children. The nationally organised Inspection of Education is responsible for inspecting the quality of early education in groups for 3 year-olds attached to the primary school (*Basisschool*); and for inspecting the schools for primary education, including classes for children aged 4 up to 6 years (Education Inspectorate, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science 2021).

2. Who belongs to the early years workforce?

2.1 Regular contact staff in ECEC provision

Childcare sector 0–3

In 2022, some 117,000 persons worked in the childcare sector. To cope with the current very high staff shortage, the Minister for Social Affairs is permitting the employment of 50% unqualified staff over the next two years. (Dutch News 2023).

Most of them are core practitioners working directly with children; 23% have a leadership position (manager of the organisation, responsible for quality and innovation and for the coaching of pedagogical workers).

According to one of the branch organisations, the social childcare sector is growing at an average annual rate of 7–9%, despite staffing challenges (BMK 2023).

All Dutch caregivers need a certificate of conduct (*Verklaring Omtrent het Gedrag, VOG*). This is a document through which the Dutch State Secretary for Security and Justice declares that the applicant has not committed any criminal offences relevant to the performance of his or her duties (e.g. sexual child abuse). Obviously, this certificate is not a qualification in the professional sense of the word, but it is a requirement for contact staff in the Netherlands.

Pedagogical Worker

Pedagogical Workers (*pedagogisch medewerkers*) are core professionals in early childhood education and care. They cooperate with one or two colleagues and are responsible for a group of children in children's centres (0–3 years) and in out-of-school care (4–13 years) in same-age or mixed age groups.

The minimum qualification that is required is a 3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work (MBO 3), although in the face of current staff shortages, this requirement has been weakened, particularly in the field of out-of-school childcare where persons with an MBO qualification from a semi-relevant field are now also eligible for employment as a Pedagogical Worker. Beginning in January 2025, all Pedagogical Workers will be required to have a sufficient level of Dutch language skills.

Pedagogical Trainee Worker

Students of MBO 3 or 4 and students following a Bachelor's degree in higher education for the Primary School Teacher profession or to become an academic Pedagogue who meet certain criteria are allowed to be paid wages for working in childcare centres. The current drastic staff shortage has even led to them being counted as qualified staff as long as they have completed

minimal additional schooling (which could be, for example, working a specified number of hours under the supervision of a fully qualified colleague).

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Teacher in Primary Education (*Basisschool*)

Teachers in Primary Education complete a 4-year higher education degree at Bachelor level (PABO – *Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs*). Again, because of staff shortages in schools, lateral entrants with a non-specialised higher education degree (ISCED 6) are allowed to enter the profession through ‘on-the-job training’, i.e. working alongside qualified Primary Teachers after an initial assessment of suitability.

Teachers with a PABO-diploma are allowed to work throughout the entire primary education, including with the youngest children. Students in the third year of the 4-year higher education course at the PABO may choose as a specialisation ‘the young child’. Special guidelines and pedagogical methods are developed for teachers working with 4 to 5 year-olds and for teachers working in the early education classes for 3 year-olds. For instance, the *Stichting leerplan ontwikkeling 2021* [Foundation for curriculum development] states that young children learn through play and that under 6 year-olds mainly learn by doing; therefore, a home corner and concrete material like puzzles, building blocks, beads and wooden numbers and letters should be available. Moreover, the *Stichting leerplan ontwikkeling* states that young children learn best if they are offered meaningful topics with which they are familiar. Think, for example, of researching plants and insects in the park next to the school.

Teaching Assistant

The Teaching Assistant supports the teacher. Two levels of training for a pedagogical support post are available. With an upper secondary qualification at level 3 (MBO 3) in social and community work and a specialisation in primary education, the Teaching Assistant is involved in tasks such as clearing up materials; collecting objects that the teacher needs for working with the children; routine paperwork; support of the physical care of children; or making coffee and lunch. The Teaching Assistant at level 4 (MBO 4) is involved in the guidance and supervision of individual children and small groups; and they assist the teacher in the preparation of and during project work by the children. Teaching Assistants are not allowed to be solely responsible for the class; they work under the supervision of the teacher. For this position there are standard job profiles.

Table 1 distinguishes between different types of contact staff categories and also categorises the core pedagogues (i.e. staff with group or centre responsibility) according to one of five ECEC professional profiles adapted from the original SEEPRO study (see Box 1 at the end of this chapter).



Table 1

Netherlands: ECEC staff in centre-based settings

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
Childcare sector				
Pedagogical Worker <i>Pedagogisch Medewerker</i> <i>Profile:</i> Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional	<i>Dagopvang in kinderdagverblijf</i> Childcare centre (including early education – VVE – programmes)) 3 months up to 4 years	Core pedagogue with group responsibility in a same-age or mixed-age group	3 months up to 4 years	3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work (MBO 3) <i>Award:</i> Certificate in Pedagogical Work Certificate for competence in Dutch language at level 3F of B2 (as from 2025) ECTS credits: n/a ³ EQF level: 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3 or 4
Pedagogical Worker for babies (under 1 year-olds)	Babies in same-age and in mixed-age groups	Core practitioner – responsible for the children and contact with parents.	3 months up to 4 years and additional specialisation in working with under 1 year-olds	Qualification as Pedagogical Worker plus Certificate 'Working with Babies' (as from 2025 mandatory)
(Pre-) Primary education sector				
Pre-primary / Primary School Teacher <i>Leerkracht</i> <i>Profile:</i> Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional	<i>Basisschool</i> Primary school 4–13 years (including voluntary pre-primary class for 4 year-olds and compulsory pre-primary class for 5 year-olds)	Core pedagogue with group/class responsibility	4–13 years	(1) 4-year higher education study programme (<i>Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs – PABO</i>) ISCED 2011: 5 or (2) 5 years higher education at university (<i>academische opleiding voor leerkracht basisschool</i>) ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6
Teaching Assistant <i>Onderwijsassistent</i>	<i>Basisschool</i> Primary school 4–13 years	Qualified co-worker	4–13 years	3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work

³ n/a not applicable

Job title	Main ECEC workplace settings and age range	Main roles and positions	Main age-range focus of initial professional education	Minimum qualification requirement ECTS credits EQF level ISCED level
	(including pre-primary classes for 4 and 5 year olds)	Teacher's class assistant		ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 4 ISCED 2011: 3 or 4

Box 1

SEEPRO profile categories for ECEC core professionals (adapted from Oberhuemer, Schreyer, and Neuman 2010)

- **Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (specialist focus, 0–6/7 years)
- **Pre-primary Education Professional** (exclusive pre-primary focus 3/4–6 years)
- **Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional** (focus on pre-primary *and* primary education 3/4–10/11 years)
- **Social and Childhood Pedagogy Professional** (mainly broad focus, including ECEC, usually 0–12 years, but sometimes including adults)
- **Social Care/Health Care Professional** (sometimes early childhood focus, sometimes broad focus, including adults)

2.2 Centre leader

Childcare sector 0–3

Managers in childcare organisations

The management functions in early education and care are diverse. These range from managers of large organisations with over 700 locations attended by over 6,000 children in childcare centres and out-of-school care to the managers of small organisations with only two or three groups of children. In small organisations with a few locations the director also has the task of location manager. In an organisation with only one location the manager combines the leadership function with working directly with children. Roughly two-thirds of centre managers have a Bachelor level qualification.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Candidates applying for a post as head or deputy head of a primary school, and thus also being responsible for pre-primary education, must hold a higher education qualification and a certificate of good conduct. Depending on the kind of management duties involved, specific competence requirements must also be met. This also applies if the post includes teaching duties (Eurydice 2023).

2.3 Centre-based posts of responsibility

Childcare sector 0–3

Pedagogical Worker in groups with under 1 year-olds (baby groups)

Pedagogical Workers in baby groups must have a certificate in 'Working with Babies', that will be legally required in 2025 (Berenschot 2022, 21). The focus of the training is on: What does a baby need during a day at the nursery? How can you give each baby enough attention in a group

of babies? Extensive attention is paid to pedagogy, development and care aimed at babies (age category from 0 up to 2 years). At the moment Pedagogical Workers who wish to qualify for working with babies can choose from 43 different courses that are certificated and accepted by the collective bargaining agreement (CAO) parties in childcare 2021 (Kinderopvang werkt 2022). These courses are offered by private companies or large childcare organisations.

Pedagogical Worker for children from disadvantaged families

Childcare centres subsidised by the local government to stimulate the development of 'disadvantaged children' are required to work with an accredited programme for early education for children aged 2½ up to 4 years and/or with children labelled as 'disadvantaged'. Groups that use an accredited programme are required to employ at least one Pedagogical Worker with the certificate for working with that specific programme. This includes having a certificate of proficiency in the Dutch language (3F or B2).

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Within primary schools, some teachers are appointed with the coordination of a part of the school based on the children's age. These are something like 'age band coordinators' mostly 'lower' (4–8 years) or 'upper' (8–12 years), sometimes also for the two years of pre-primary education (4–6 years). So the 'lower age band coordinator' (*onderbouw coördinator*) is the relevant post of responsibility for pre-primary education. Specific responsibility may differ from school to school, but it usually includes a combination of practical and pedagogical coordination tasks. There are no specific qualification or other requirements for this. The teacher is usually granted a certain amount of hours for this coordinating role.

2.4 Co-ordinating and supervisory staff

Childcare sector 0–3

Since January 2019, childcare organisations are required to provide a Pedagogical Coach and/or a Pedagogical Policy Assistant to the manager of the organisation (SZW 2020).

Pedagogical Coaches (*pedagogisch beleidsmedewerker*) support Pedagogical Workers in their work with children and parents. Full-time staff receive ten hours of coaching per year (Kinderopvang totaal 2023). The coach can help familiarise new colleagues, observe individual children, analyse group dynamics and cooperate in preparing specific activities.

Pedagogical Policy Employees support the leading managers in evaluating, preparing and implementing pedagogical policy issues.

Both have a minimum qualification of MBO 4 (ISCED 3 or 4⁴) plus successfully completed courses to prepare them for their position. In the collective bargaining agreement (CAO, Kinderopvang werkt 2022) both functions are classified at HBO level (*hoger beroepsonderwijs* – higher vocational education, ISCED 6). In smaller organisations one or two Pedagogical Workers can combine the function of Pedagogical Coach or Policy Employee.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Inspectors are employed by a (local) authority outside the schools to carry out inspections both of primary schools and childcare centres. There are no specific job requirements for this post.

⁴ To qualify for an MBO 4, this can be done either directly after secondary school (3/4 years, classified as ISCED 3) or by first doing an MBO3 and then a specialist training for MBO 4 (classified as ISCED 4).



However, preferred candidates are those with relevant field experience and/or analytical skills. Inspectors have the same legal status as civil servants.

2.5 Specialist support staff

In the **childcare/early education** sector, there are no legal requirements or regulations governing the responsibility for support and guidance.

In **pre-primary education**, a special needs coordinator (*intern begeleider*) is appointed to support individual children who need additional backing. It is also their role to support the teachers of these children. There are no specific requirements for this job, although many schools require a specialised training before taking on such a role within the school.

Special schools also employ specialist support staff such as Speech Therapists, Physiotherapists and Mobility Instructors.

3. Structural composition of ECEC workforce: qualifications, gender, ethnicity

Level of education

The majority of Pedagogical Workers working in the childcare 0–3 sector have an intermediate level vocational training certificate in childcare (*Pedagogisch Werk* – MBO level 3). In 2015, a third of the Pedagogical Workers were educated at MBO level 4; more recent figures are not available. Since the law on Innovation and Quality in Child Care and Education came into force (Wet IKK 2018; SZW 2020), the employers' organisation of the childcare sector has tried to increase the level of education of Pedagogical Workers with an MBO 4 level vocational qualification (ISCED level 4).

Up to 2024, a maximum of one half of the professionals to be employed at a childcare setting may be not-yet-qualified, that is pedagogical staff on their way to becoming a qualified Pedagogical Worker (student staff members or trainees) (The Holland Times 2022, 26). This is the requirement stated in the Childcare Act regulations. However, since 2020 there is an increasing proportion of not-yet-qualified student-trainees in childcare centres working in the position of a Pedagogical Worker. In 2022, childcare organisations are temporarily (for six months) allowing one student trainee for every qualified Pedagogical Worker responsible for a group of children. This measure is being taken because of the tight labour market and the dire shortage of qualified workers. This temporary measure implies that 50% of the staff is permitted to be in training, i.e. not-yet-qualified.

Data from 2012 state that roughly three-quarters of childcare managers/centre heads had a Bachelor-level qualification (Fukkink et al. 2013). This distribution has been confirmed in the more recent Dutch National Childcare Quality Monitor (Romijn et al. 2023a).

Gender

Staff in the Dutch ECEC workforce are predominantly female. The number of men has always been modest in childcare and has diminished further for work with children under 4 years of age (Van Polanen et al. 2017). In 2021, 12.7% male staff worked in the childcare sector, but half of them in after-school childcare rather than early childhood setting. Males seldom work in baby

groups. Teachers in primary schools are also predominantly female; 12.3% were male in 2021 (Berenschot 2022, 82ff).

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of ECEC staff is mixed, but national data are not registered in the Netherlands; recent figures are therefore not available. In a large scale childcare assessment study (Fukkink et al. 2013), about one in 11 caregivers was not born in the Netherlands. This distribution has been confirmed in the more recent Dutch National Childcare Quality Monitor (Romijn et al. 2023a). Dutch was the home language for 92% of the caregivers. But there is local variation in the composition of staff, which reflects differences in the population between the major cities in the urban part of the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht) and other parts of the country. For example, Amsterdam and subsequently Rotterdam and The Hague have recently become ‘majority-minority cities’ (Crul, Uslu, and Lelie 2016), where no one ethnic group can be described as a majority group and the superdiversity of these cities is reflected in the child population and staff in these areas.

Age and years of work experience

Staff in the childcare sector are relatively young. In 2021, 49% were under the age of 35. In comparable sectors of care, welfare and education, an average of 37% is younger than 35 years. Only 12% were 55 years or older in the childcare sector. The number of years that employees work in childcare is also relatively low. About half (49%) have been working in childcare for less than 5 years; and about a third (34%) work for ten years or more. The young age is probably related to the fact that childcare is a relatively new sector in the Netherlands. Childcare and out-of-school care have only been offered on a larger scale since 1990 (Berenschot 2022, 83f).

4. Initial professional education (IPE)

4.1 Initial qualifying routes (higher education and vocational)

Childcare sector 0–3

Pedagogical Worker (*Pedagogisch Medewerker*)

The pre-service training requirement for the childcare sector in the Netherlands is a three-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work (MBO 3). The training routes for Social Cultural Work (*Sociaal-cultureel werker*, SCW) and Teaching Assistant (*Onderwijsassistent*), both vocational qualifications at intermediate level, also qualify for childcare work. The entry requirement for this education is the pre-vocational track of secondary education or equivalent educational levels. This Pedagogical Work IPE is organised at two levels: EQF/ISCED 3 and 4. The majority of caregivers has a certificate at EQF level 3. At both levels 3 and 4 the qualifying route distinguishes between two learning paths: the school-based pathway or the on-the-job training pathway. In the school-based pathway, learning at school accounts for the largest part of the course (about 60%) and students tend to be younger than in the on-the-job training route. Students combine this with internships, starting from their first year. In the on-the-job training pathway, students work mainly in childcare settings as trainees and they combine this with school experience (about 20%).

There is no certificate at higher educational level (EQF 5 or 6) which is required for employees in the childcare sector. This level is not included in the current childcare regulations for staff and the required qualifications. However, as previously described, a number of higher-level routes



also qualify for ECEC work, although these are barely represented in the childcare workforce. These include a relevant associate degree (pedagogic-educational co-worker, childcare worker, educational support worker) and a Bachelor-level degree (primary school education, pedagogy, social work, cultural-societal work, pedagogical management).

Furthermore, *Pedagogisch Medewerker* as well as assistant staff must have language skills at least at level B2. By 2025, those working with babies need to complete an additional training (Berenschot 2022, 21).

Table 2

Netherlands: Pedagogical Worker

Job title in Dutch: <i>Pedagogisch Medewerker, Leidster</i> Profile: Early Childhood Pedagogy Professional
Entry requirements: Completion of secondary education or equivalent Professional studies: 3-year upper secondary vocational course in Pedagogical Work Award: Certificate in Pedagogical Work ECTS credits: n/a EQF level: 3 or 4 ISCED 2011: 3 or 4 Main ECEC workplaces: <i>Kinderdagverblijf</i> (childcare centre, 0-3 years); <i>Reguliere peuterspeelzaal</i> (regular playgroup, 2½ up to 4 years)

Note: The qualification routes for social cultural work (*Sociaal-cultureel werker.*, SCW) and Teaching Assistant (*Onderwijsassistent*), which have similar qualification requirements, also qualify for working in childcare settings.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Teachers in primary education (*Basisschool*) who work with 4 and 5 year-olds have a Bachelor-level qualification (*Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs – PABO*) and the course of studies lasts 4 years. In recent years, some IPE institutes in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Nijmegen have been offering, in close collaboration with the university, a new type of teacher education/training which combines a vocational track at higher education level and an academic track in a five-year IPE route (instead of four years). More specifically, the regular teacher education course is complemented with educational, pedagogic and research modules at academic Bachelor level. This type of teacher preparation is referred to as academic teacher education/training (*academische PABO*).

Table 4

Netherlands: Primary School Teacher (pre-primary)

Job title in Dutch: <i>Leerkracht</i> Profile: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Route 1: Entry requirements: University entrance qualification Professional studies: 4 years of study at a vocational higher education institution ('Pedagogical Academy') specialising in pedagogy (<i>Pedagogisch Academie voor het basisonderwijs – PABO</i>) Award: Professional Bachelor's degree ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Main workplace: <i>Basisschool</i> , working with 4–13 year olds Route 2: Entry requirements: University entrance qualification



Job title in Dutch: <i>Leerkracht</i> Profile: Pre-primary and Primary Education Professional
Professional studies: 5 years of study at a vocational higher education institution specialising in pedagogy in close collaboration with the regional university Award: Academic Bachelor (<i>academische PABO</i>) ECTS credits: 240 EQF level: 6 ISCED 2011: 6 Main workplace: <i>Basisschool</i> , working with 4–13 year-olds (4–7, 8–13)

4.2 Competences, curricula and pedagogic-didactic approaches in IPE programmes

Pedagogical Worker (*Pedagogisch Medewerker*)

Competence requirements: The competence requirements for Pedagogical Workers are organised into ten clusters focused on (1) the primary process (interactions with children and parents) and (2) their functioning as a professional in the specific context and (3) their own professional development (EVC-Branchestandaard 2021).

Table 5

Netherlands: Clusters of competence requirements for Pedagogical Workers

Cluster	Competences
<i>Cluster 1</i> Caring for the emotional and physical well-being of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing emotional support (sensitive responsiveness) – Providing support on a physical level
<i>Cluster 2</i> Ensuring the safety of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing an emotionally safe base – Creating a safe environment for discovery, practice and adventure – Matching the approach to the situation, developmental age and individual needs – Responding to (possibly) unacceptable behaviour toward the child
<i>Cluster 3</i> Following and stimulating the development and learning of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Monitoring the development and respond to it – Supporting and stimulating competences and talents – Letting children experience, discover, explore and expand – Providing a balance between new and familiar things – Enabling children to learn in a goal-oriented way
<i>Cluster 4</i> Supporting and stimulating play and leisure activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supporting play and leisure activities as a basis for development – Enriching children's experiences
<i>Cluster 5</i> Supporting and stimulating autonomy, participation and citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing space and respect autonomy – Involving and empower children – Motivating children to engage in social activities and build friendships – Enabling children to connect with society
<i>Cluster 6</i> Influencing the behaviour of and interaction between children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Promoting positive interactions between children – Providing structure and set boundaries – Offering process-based support – Responding to special behaviour/characteristics

Cluster	Competences
<i>Cluster 7</i> Establishing a partnership with the parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Hearing and seeing the parents – Sharing information with the parents – Collaborating with the parents – Working with the parents on joint responsibility and involvement
<i>Cluster 8</i> Collaborating with colleagues and other professionals in the child's environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Working on an unequivocal approach/support with direct colleagues – Stimulating each other as colleagues – Collaborating with other professionals – Collaborating in a dynamic environment
<i>Cluster 9</i> Improving the service quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Maintaining the quality of work – Evaluating and justifying work and actions – Improving the work
<i>Cluster 10</i> Developing in the profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continuing to develop – Using acquired expertise – Monitoring one's own working conditions.

Curriculum: The MBO 3 course contains: a) general subjects (citizenship and the ethics of being professional); arithmetic level 2F; Dutch language level 3F; b) subjects to become a competent Pedagogical Worker (communication, play activities, stimulating child development, pedagogy, cooperation with parents, first aid, professional development; c) apprenticeship of at least 570 hours: part time during the 3-year course or full time over a period of several weeks or months.

Primary School Teacher (*Leerkracht*)

The competence specifications for teachers are laid down in the Education Professions Act 2013. Schools are required to keep a record of the competences of each member of the teaching staff, setting out agreements made between the employer and the teacher on, for instance, continuing professional development.

Competence requirements: Seven competences with Dublin Descriptors (knowing, applying, evaluating, communicating, learning to learn) are distinguished in the national curriculum of the teacher education programme for Primary School Teachers: interpersonal; pedagogical; didactic; organisational; team collaboration; collaboration with local community; reflection and professional development (*Stichting leerplan ontwikkeling, 2021*). Specific indicators are distinguished at different levels during pre-service training: qualified for training after year 1 (level 1), qualified for final traineeship (level 2) and qualified to start practising in schools (Bachelor level, level 3).

Curricular areas: The Primary Education Act (1998) sets out the basic principles, objectives and core objectives of primary education. The core objectives describe what a school up to group 8 (oldest children) must offer the pupil. Schools are allowed to shape the teaching and learning processes themselves, i.e. didactic method, teaching materials, distribution over school years. The national teacher education profile distinguishes between seven key learning areas (see above). The (pedagogical) content knowledge includes language, maths, geography, history, physics, biology, music, drama, arts, gymnastics, ethical education or philosophy. Further, teacher education at different higher education institutions may also include complementary curricular areas or a special emphasis (e.g. on urban education, integrated children's centre, science). Core subjects of the primary school are Dutch language, maths and science, world orientation, artistic orientation, physical education and (in group 8) English.

4.3 Alternative entry and qualification routes, system permeability

Childcare sector 0–3

Pedagogical Trainee Worker

Employees who wish to be employed as a Pedagogical Worker but do not have the required diplomas can qualify via a pre-designed route based on their individual competences. These can be employees with considerable practical experience; employees with a different education at EQF levels 3 or 4 (e.g. for work with the disabled, the elderly); employees with a HBO diploma (EQF 5 or 6) that does not qualify for working with young children. For workers in out-of-school care settings, certificates in sports, art or music can be accepted for entry into an Assessment of Prior Learning procedure (*Erkenning Verworven Competencie – EVC*).

The Pedagogical Trainee Workers have to prove that they meet the acknowledged standard for a qualified Pedagogical Worker in childcare during in an EVC procedure. When the employee meets the standards, they no longer need to obtain a diploma to meet the qualification requirement for a pedagogical employee. This procedure may last three years with about 12 hours of training on a weekly basis.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Prospective Primary School Teachers may follow a condensed curriculum at the higher education institution for Primary School Teachers (*PABO*) if they have already finished an alternative study route at Professional Bachelor or Academic Bachelor level (lateral entrants – *zij-instromers*). Teaching Assistants in schools may also follow a new study programme to obtain a higher vocational level, moving for instance from MBO level 4 to HBO level. Recently, it has become possible for teachers working in primary schools and with an academic background to apply for a PhD scholarship (*Lerarenbeurs*).

5. Guided workplace experience (practicum) in the initial professional education of core professionals

Childcare sector 0–3

Childcare training routes follow two learning paths: the school-based track (BOL – in Dutch) and the on-the-job track (BBL – in Dutch). However, the latter is not standardised practice.

The duration of the **school-based BOL** route depends on the MBO level aimed for and to a certain extent on the specific school programme. In general, the level 3 course lasts three years, full time, and workplace experience starts after a few months. This either builds up over time (starting with one day per week in year 1 and three days per week in year 3) or is more or less consistent (then usually 2–3 days per week). The competences they are expected to build are described in *chapter 4*.

In terms of the **on-the-job BBL** qualifying route, if the student aims for the MBO 3 level, it usually takes two years to complete. Roughly 80% of the time is spent in the workplace and 20% in the upper secondary school (i.e. generally four days in an ECEC setting and one day at school). For the MBO 4 level qualification, an additional 1-1½ years are needed.



Although the student is to be supported and supervised by an educator from the ECEC institution and by a staff member of an accredited job training childcare centre, there are no standard regulations for this. Little is known about the quality of support or the amount of time spent on supervision.

Job training centres and vocational training centres ('ROC's') may collaborate at a regional level to advance professional development.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Work-based learning is a regular part of teacher education programmes for Primary School Teachers (PABO). Students complete an internship in both the lower as well as the middle and upper primary grades. Work-based learning starts in the first year of the PABO and students are placed in a primary school for one or two days per week. Students play an increasingly active role, starting with observing the class, then assisting with part of a lesson, and finally teaching classes for part of the day. In the final year of the Bachelor's degree studies, workplace-based learning takes place during an extensive period of half a year in which the student is responsible for the class and is also a full member of the school team (lio-stage). Workplace learning is supervised by a tutor from the IPE institution and by a staff member of the host school. Whether the supervising teacher receives remuneration for this depends on the school and on other factors related, for example, to the staff member's function within the school, for which they may be on a higher salary, or whether this kind of mentoring is understood as part of the teacher's 'non-contact time'.

Dutch teacher education institutions (PABO) work with primary schools in regional networks to exchange findings and to promote the professional level of the field.

The post of Trainee Teacher (LIO) was introduced in primary schools in August 2000. Students in the final year of their training can be employed part time under a training and employment contract for a limited period (equivalent to no more than five months' full time), provided the school has a vacancy. The Trainee Teacher is supervised by a qualified teacher and does everything a regular member of staff would do. This makes the transition from student to teacher less abrupt and the teacher education institutions are better able to keep abreast of current developments in education (Eurydice 2023, 9.1).

6. Continuing professional development (CPD) of ECEC staff

Childcare sector 0–3

Legislation/regulation: The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment has undertaken several measures to promote professional development in the childcare sector. In 2012, the Ministry developed an agenda for improving the pedagogical quality of childcare together with stakeholders, i.e. employer representatives, employees, parents, researchers (BKK 2012). A cornerstone in their approach is the provision of training aimed at the improvement of pedagogical interaction skills, informed by scientific evidence from international and Dutch experimental research, which showed that specialised training can improve the process quality of childcare and the pedagogical quality of interactions between staff and children (see Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt 2018). Training courses were developed that are focused on language and interaction skills

(including sensitive responsiveness, respect for autonomy, structuring and limit setting, verbal communication, developmental stimulation, fostering positive peer interactions (see Helmerhorst et al. 2017).

The introduction of the Childcare Innovation and Quality Act in 2018 enhanced the quality debate, in particular through measures relating to ongoing professionalisation through on-site coaches, improved staff to child ratios, raising the level of required language skills (see *chapter 2*) and strengthening the cooperation between the childcare sector and education (*Wet Innovatie en Kwaliteit Kinderopvang – IKK, SZW 2020*). It is a legal requirement that professionals working with the youngest children (0–2) need a special training for this. The service providers therefore pay for these courses and the time needed for them.

Providers: The IKK measures invoked projects on lifelong learning (*Permanente Educatie Pedagogische Professionals*) that aim to stimulate professional development with modules, tests and accreditation of certificates for ECEC staff. Courses for CPD and certification are developed and offered by a multitude of large and small private organisations working at the national or local level. For instance, the website for childcare organisations mentions 23 accredited courses for Pedagogical Workers to obtain a certificate for working with babies (*Kinderopvang werkt!* n.d.(b), n.d.(c).

Access: In 2019, 77% of employees indicated that they had followed some form of training in the past 12 months (Berenschot 2022, 86). Further training is related to the tightening of quality requirements since 2018 (see above IKK measures). Moreover, the collective labour agreement for the childcare sector states that employers have to make a yearly plan for the training and education of staff. Organisations are required to describe what they do to evaluate and promote the quality of the pedagogical work, cooperation with parents and continuing professional education of the staff.

Main forms: The staff can be permitted to follow courses to refresh their capacities, to obtain a higher level of education or to study a specific topic related to organisational innovation, such as ‘diversity’, ‘sustainability’, ‘health and food’, or cooperation between the childcare sector and primary education. The scope, form and duration is entirely a matter for the service providers and little is known how regularly CPD activities take place. However, in-house professional development is regulated: at a minimum of 50 hours coaching and training per setting and a minimum of 10 hours per year per full-time teacher. This has to be facilitated and organised within the ECEC centre. The national labour agreement for ECEC teachers differentiates between necessary CPD (e.g. the baby course mentioned earlier) and additional CPD. Attending CPD sessions beyond the legally required has to be negotiated between staff and centre managers, both in terms of time and payment.

Pre-primary education 4–5 years in schools

Legislation/regulation: As part of collective labour agreements, teachers in pre-primary education have the right to individualised professional development for two hours per week (when full-time employed). These hours are in addition to team-based schooling days. Moreover, schools have on average €500 per FTE (full time equivalent) available for this individual professional development. The directors and participation councils (which consists of teachers working in the school) decide how the budget is allocated.

To improve teachers’ professional development and career prospects, the 2020 Teacher Action Plan introduced various additional measures, including: a teacher development grant (covering course fees and material costs to follow a BA/MA) and the prospect of promotion with higher salaries (Eurydice 2023, 9.3).



Providers: Schools for primary, secondary and special education have their own budgets for in-service training. There are no specific in-service training institutions governed by law. Courses can be provided by institutions within both the public and commercial domain. Many are provided by teacher education institutions (HBO institutions and universities with teacher education departments). They are sometimes organised in cooperation with the school advisory services, one of the national educational advisory centres or experts from outside the education system (Eurydice 2023, 9.3).

Access: In 2022, approximately 70% of employees indicated that they had followed some form of training in the past two years (Arbeidsmarktplatform 2022). The vast majority (92%) feels (somewhat) supported by their management to engage in continuing professional development. There are no national data available about the further extent to which teachers engage in professional development activities.

Main forms: Sometimes course offers are for both Pedagogical Workers and Primary Teachers – for instance, training for interactions with young children, and for the staff working with early intervention programmes. Specific language training has recently been provided on a large national scale to raise the linguistic competences of staff; if teachers are not certified at a certain proficiency level (level 3F, which is equivalent to an ISCED level 5 or Bachelor level), they are not allowed to work in a pre-primary education setting.

One of the themes that has recently received attraction in the Netherlands is urban education and working as a teacher in an urban context (Fukkink and Oostdam 2016). Urban education may be an integral part of the IPE programme, but also plays a role in continuing professional development. For ECEC staff, early intervention programmes for young children are an important topic in urban contexts.

Primary School Teachers may also choose to follow a Master's degree in education. Popular courses are the Master in Educational Leadership, Master in Educational Needs and Master in Pedagogy, which are accredited by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation (*Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisati*, NVAO).

7. Working conditions and current workforce issues

7.1 Remuneration

The average gross salary of a full-time worker in the Netherlands was €2,238 in 2023 (Nationaleberoepengids.nl 2023a). The gross salary of a full-time Pedagogical Worker ranges between €1,889 and €2,588 per month, depending on the level of education and length of working experience. The salaries of core pedagogues in childcare settings are, on average, lower than those of Primary School Teachers. The gross average salary of a full-time Primary School Teacher is €4,530, i.e. between €3,001 and €6,059 per month (Nationaleberoepengids.nl 2023b). Whether it is possible to live on a salary of a Pedagogical Worker in the childcare sector depends on where they live in the Netherlands. Housing is very expensive in the big cities, and it will be hard to find affordable housing, both for Pedagogical Workers and Primary School Teachers. This is one of the reasons why it is so hard to recruit them in urban areas. It can be difficult to get by on a salary as a Pedagogical Worker or Teacher.

Since the introduction of a more flexible personnel budget, school boards have more scope to give their teachers a performance-related allowance or bonus. They may decide to do so on the

basis of an assessment. It is up to the school to decide under what conditions bonuses or allowances will be granted, and how much money they are prepared to allocate for them (Eurydice 2023, 9.2).

7.2 Full-time and part-time employment in ECEC provision

Dutch society is characterised by part-time work, especially among women with children. In this respect, the childcare sector and primary education are no exception.

In 2021, professionals in the **childcare sector** worked on average 65% of the possible hours of a full-time job; that is 26 hours per week (Berenschot 2022, 82). As a result, the majority of children under the age of 4 also attend ECEC on a part-time basis (on average 2 days per week).

In the **primary sector** in 2023, more than half (59%) of the Teachers worked on average between 2½ and four days per week (0.72 of FTE), 32% worked (almost) full-time (four to five days, 0.8 FTE) and only 9% worked less than 2.5 days (0.5 FTE) (Ministerie OCW 2023).

7.3 Support measures in the workplace for newly qualified and newly appointed staff

Support measures for Pedagogical Workers include the on-site Pedagogical Coach, as described in *chapter 2.3*.

Teachers are appointed by the school board. Each school board is responsible for personnel policies and for supervising, supporting and assessing newly qualified teachers. The necessary funds are included in the school's block grant. The money may be spent on supervising Trainee Teachers, lateral-entry teachers and other new staff members.

Staff assessments are based on two instruments: job performance interviews, in which teachers discuss their performance with their heads, and consider their prospects for the future; assessment interviews, in which the teacher's performance in the period preceding the interview is assessed.

Most schools regularly hold job performance interviews with their teaching staff, in most cases once every two years. Information on a teacher's performance is mainly supplied by the individual concerned. In primary schools, classroom observation is also an important source of information (Eurydice 2023, 9.2).

7.4 Non-contact time

The employers in the childcare sector are required to ensure that at least 50 hours per year are available for non-group work for each full-time pedagogical employee. However, these hours are not an individual right. The employer can decide how to allocate non-group hours among employees. There are no national regulations regarding non-contact time for individual members of the Dutch staff in the child care sector.

The standard number of hours to be worked per year is fixed at 1,659 for all sectors of education. Primary and special school teachers may spend an average of no more than 930 hours a year on teaching duties (Eurydice 2023, 9.2).

Teachers in pre-primary/ primary education have an individual right of 7 days for studying per year if they work full time. According to the collective agreement, Primary School Teachers have to spend 56% of their time in contact with children (PO-raad 2022). The rest of their time is allocated to preparation, checking students' schoolwork, contact with parents, team meetings, etc. Many teachers complain that they have to work more hours per week than they are paid for. But on average teachers have more opportunities for study and collaborative work than the pedagogical staff in the child care sector. These and other differences in the working conditions

of Teachers and Pedagogical Workers are one of the obstacles in the integration of education sector and childcare sector.

7.5 Current staffing issues

The Dutch childcare sector consists exclusively of private companies. Working parents pay these companies for the hours their children spend in the setting. Working parents are financially supported by the the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment through the tax system. Linking financial support to the number of hours parents work makes the childcare system vulnerable and dependent on labour market fluctuations. In the 2010s, the Dutch economy and childcare market was declining, following a significant drop in demand for places. A shift was observed from the use of formal childcare to informal childcare arrangements (e.g. grandparents taking care of their grandchildren). But in the 2020s, the economy is growing and in 2022 there is a very tense labour market with shortages of employees, staff and labourers in almost every sector, including childcare and education (UWV 2022).

Childcare organisations and primary schools have been struggling with serious staff shortages since 2015. In recent years, they have increased. In January 2022, a quarter of entrepreneurs said they were experiencing problems due to labour shortage (Berenschot 2022, 82). Results from the Dutch National Daycare Monitor indicate a substantial increase in reported labour shortage since 2019. The experienced problems are a combination of market wide labour shortages and an increasing number of staff on sick leave (Slot et al. 2023b). Among other things, these shortages are related to the higher qualification requirements that have been introduced since 2019, reducing the potential number of pedagogical staff who meet these requirements. In addition, the staff-child ratio in the baby groups was changed from 1: 4 to 1: 3 children. More staff are therefore needed for the baby groups.

A number of measures have been taken to solve this labour market problem:

1. In the context of an acute shortage of staff, the government has allowed a temporarily lowering of qualification requirements. Pedagogical Trainee Workers may be included when calculating the required number of employees in a group. It will be easier for people without the required qualifications to enter the field (Rijksoverheid 2021; Kinderopvang werkt! 2022).
2. Most Pedagogical Workers are employed on a part-time basis (Berenschot 2022, 82). Employers are looking for measures to stimulate the staff to work more hours. A survey shows that especially workers in out-of-school childcare are keen to work longer hours. Current working hours for out-of-school care workers are short and fragmented throughout the day and week. Their working hours depend on school hours. The opening hours of many schools date from the time when mothers were at home with their children, with breaks at noon, finishing at 15:30 and closing on Wednesday afternoons.
3. Measures to make the work more attractive and to reduce sick leave and work pressure: The unions are committed to wage increases and better fringe benefits. Private companies can give the workers a rise if the (well-off) parents are willing to pay higher fees. The employers in the childcare sector are also trying to make the work more attractive by emphasising the pedagogical value of working with young children and in out-of-school care.

The organisation of employers in the childcare sector (BMK 2023) fears that the staff shortage will have a negative effect on quality and standards for staff qualifications. On the one hand, there is pressure from parents (and their companies) for more childcare – the waiting lists are currently growing; on the other hand, there is the risk of unqualified personnel and decline in quality.

According to a recent labour market survey, after the considerable staff shortages registered between October 2022 and March 2023, a slight decrease can be seen among the different types of childcare organisations. However, an increase in the shortage is expected in toddler care. To solve the staff shortage, organisations are taking various measures, such as having pedagogical staff fill in or help out (82%), having employees work above their contractual hours (58%), and deploying more trainees (52%) (Kinderopvang werkt! 2023).

8. Recent policy reforms and initiatives relating to staffing and professionalisation issues

Towards a national pedagogical curriculum: initiatives of stakeholders

Until now, the Dutch government has refrained from establishing a national curriculum for childcare centres. The official ideology is that the government does not interfere with the content of upbringing. The government only provides a broad framework that has to be taken into account by the childcare companies, i.e. the service providers. Various initiatives are being taken to formulate a Dutch pedagogical framework and curriculum; these frameworks or curricula are not recognised by the government. In 2008, the National Platform of Pedagogues in Childcare Centres managed to get a subsidy from the Ministry of Social Affairs for a project that resulted in a pedagogical framework for childcare centres 0–4 years (*Pedagogisch kader kindercentra 0–4 jaar* (Singer and Kleerekoper 2009). Professionals, parents, policy makers and researchers from all over the country participated in discussion groups. Later, pedagogical frameworks for after-school care (Schreuder et al. 2011), home-based ECEC provision (Boogaard et al. 2013) and diversity (van Keulen and Singer 2012) were published.

In 2017, the National Expertise Centre for Childcare (*Landelijk Expertisecentrum Kinderopvang*), also published an educational curriculum for the young child in childcare (*Pedagogisch curriculum voor het jonge kind in de kinderopvang*, Fukkink 2017) and trainings were offered for implementation in private organisations.

The national organisation of companies in the childcare sector (Brancheorganisatie Kinderopvang 2023) has published a discussion paper to develop a shared pedagogical vision on caring for and educating young children in children's centres (Brancheorganisatie kinderopvang 2022). The organisation is an important stakeholder in the privatised childcare sector; 80% of organisations that offer childcare are members of this nation-wide organisation. With the discussion paper of 2021, it is the first time that an organisation of employers expresses its pedagogical view on early education. The paper has a strong focus on the value of and children's need to play which is reflected in the title: *"Space for play". An academic essay on play, playing and space for play, and on how young children are on a melting rock of ice* (Brancheorganisatie kinderopvang 2022). The *Brancheorganisatie* has organised conferences and workshops for managers in the childcare sector to discuss the paper and the opportunities for implementation by companies. The process of implementation is ongoing; it is too early to assess the impact.

Cooperation between professional organisations related to early education and care

Recently, extensive cooperation between schools, teacher education institutions and universities has been taking place in several collaborative field and research projects such as academic workshops (*academische werkplaats or werkplaats*) in Amsterdam, Tilburg and Utrecht with external funding. In these projects, professional development occurs in field-based research and

development projects between a university, the teacher education department of a university of applied sciences and several primary schools (Ploeger and Fukkink 2013).

Several new initiatives are focusing on the integration of the childcare sector and the education sector. For instance, a group of policymakers of diverse municipalities have united to stimulate the development of so-called 'Integrated children's centres' (*Integrale Kindcentra, IKC*), that integrate facilities for childcare, education and youth health care in their municipalities as long as there is no legislation or regulations which provide a framework for this (Veen et al. 2019). The leading group of policymakers is contributing towards making that legal framework possible. Several cooperative projects have been initiated. In 2020, the Platform Children's Centres (*Platform Kindcentra*) was set up. The Platform consists of representatives of employees, sector and parent organisations from childcare and primary education and 'adjacent' organisations that are involved with the young child from the sectors of art, culture, sport, youth care, youth health care, emancipation, science and more. In *chapter 9* research related to the development and impact of integrated children's centres will be discussed.

Another initiative focuses on the transition between ECEC and primary education. Several schools started collaborations in so called "*peuter-kleutergroepen*": groups where toddlers and kindergartners are mixed and supported by the presence of a Pedagogical Worker and Primary School Teacher. An exploratory study on the quality of these groups show that a similar level of quality is provided when comparing them with regular toddler or kindergarten groups (Fukkink et al. 2023). Overall, children's well-being and engagement is considered high, though the results seem a bit more in favour of the kindergartners than the toddlers. Kindergartners seem to have more interactions with peers and teachers and a higher level of well-being compared to the toddlers in the same group. A second important conclusion relates to the collaboration between staff members and role division during the day. These groups require a new way of working for both the Pedagogical Worker as well as the Primary School Teacher. More attention should be given to their collaboration and how this relates to the schools' vision of early child development.

Initiatives for system reform

The current Dutch ECEC system is under pressure and is likely to undergo reform in the years to come. Several societal discourses and events have triggered the drive for innovation. The first relates to the growing legitimacy of ECEC as a formal institution with the potential to narrow early education gaps. This growing understanding of the public role of ECEC raises questions about the privatised and marketised system in the Netherlands that was historically developed as an instrument to increase labour market participation. In addition to this, there is an ongoing debate about the effectiveness of market principles in 'public' sectors and its impact on quality. More specifically, privatisation and marketisation have opened up the sector for private equity which raises the question as to what extent it is ethical to make private profits within a system that is largely funded by the government. A third trigger has to do with the way the system is funded by the government. The Dutch ECEC system is characterised by indirect funding, meaning that childcare providers are not paid by the government directly, but by the parents who receive benefits from the government. These benefits are income dependent, ranging from 33% for high-income families to 96% for low-income families. The indirect benefits system is considered too complex and sensitive to errors. In 2018, it was brought to light that the Tax and Customs Administration that is responsible for the benefits system made false allegations of fraud. Approximately 26,000 parents were wrongfully accused by the authorities, which required them to pay back the entire amount of benefits they had received. For many parents this amounted



to tens of thousands of euros, driving families into severe financial hardship with far-reaching consequences (e.g., parents losing custody over their children).

As a result, several stakeholders have been advocating reforms. Several studies and papers have been written on the topic in the past few years, (e.g., Leseman et al. 2021; Van Eijkel et al. 2023; Van Huizen & Plantenga 2023), some of them commissioned by the government. These publications point out the possible implications of reforms both on a pedagogical level (i.e., quality and equal opportunities for child development) and an economic level. Given the political sensitivity of the topic and the huge economical impact, it is hard to speculate how and when the system will change. Yet the call for a new system has been widely acknowledged.

9. Recent country-specific research focusing on ECEC staff

Integration of child care, early education and youth health care

Source: Doornenbal, J., and A. Kassenberg 2022 (see *References* for full details)

Background: Initiatives to develop integrated services and education for young children. The teacher education department of the university of applied sciences in Groningen (*De Hanze school*) is committed to field research projects to support the development of Integrated children's centres.

Aims: The focus is on field research of 'what works' principles in innovation processes in education. Innovation cannot only rely on the implementation of 'evidence-based' programmes; teachers' day-to-day practice involves working with 'evidence based programmes' only 20% of the time.

Procedure: Several pilot settings ('field labs') were set up to create an inclusive play-learning environment in which every child (from 0 to 6 years) can blossom. They started in 2015, and an evaluation was published in 2017 (Doornenbal et al. 2017). A mixed method design was used: (1) A qualitative case study focused on regularly visiting, monitoring and supporting eight field labs in their development and discussing processes and results. (2) An Interprofessional Collaboration Monitor was set up to analyse quantitatively the nature and degree of interprofessional collaboration: is the collaboration changing and contributing to the aims of the field labs? (3) A survey among project leaders to assess whether more or less children have been referred to youth care and/or special (primary) education compared to the situation before the field labs.

Findings: The following contributory factors in the development of an Integrated Children's Centre (IKC) were found (Doornenbal 2007): (1) Openness: a mixed population of children from different backgrounds; flexibility towards parents and children adapted to the specific needs in the municipality; open for children with disabilities. (2) Learning: a pedagogical climate that offers security, structure and opportunities to explore; supporting a positive identity and self-esteem in children; a balance between cognitive, social and moral learning; professionals who are involved and have the necessary didactic skills and knowledge. (3) Professional Community: moral and visionary leadership; balance between working along planned and systemic lines and space for improvisations; cooperation between professionals of different backgrounds, and between professionals, parents and local policy makers. The increased interprofessional collaboration is striking in all pilot projects. Professionals talk about learning from each other and that a common vision of child development and support arises. The extent to which this leads to better handling of differences and fewer referrals is modest, but certainly not negligible. The field labs show that

the emphasis shifts from curative to preventive and strengthening the pedagogical climate. The integrated children's centres that were most effective had an elaborated pedagogical concept that was shared by all involved professionals. There was a high investment in the quality of the professionals and continuing professional development. They used structured programmes to stimulate the development and education of under 4 year-olds children with less free play; there were more activities to involve the parents and a better embedding in the neighbourhood (Slot and Leseman 2020).

Implications: The field labs of Integrated children's centres and other initiatives aimed to stimulate the collaboration of Pedagogical Workers, Primary School Teachers, professionals in youth health care and parents. The field labs show that there are a number of obstacles to be faced. These are in particular the obstacles caused by the fact that childcare, education and youth health care fall under the responsibility of different ministries, have different legal frameworks and different organisations for inspection. Professionals in the three sectors have different working conditions, including salaries, working hours and rights to further professional training (Doornenbal and Kassenberg 2022).

Overall quality of the childcare system

Sources: Romijn et al. 2023a; Slot et al. 2023b (see *References* for full details)

Background: The Dutch National Daycare Quality Monitor (LKK in Dutch) was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. It is a 9-year project (2017-2026), with yearly measurements and reports on the status quo of the country. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the scheduled measurement of 2020 was determined and the measurements of 2021 and 2022 were combined in one bigger sample. Quality is determined as a multifaceted construct and as such a wide variety of measures are used to study the process quality, structural quality, curriculum quality and organisational quality of the Dutch ECEC system.

Methods: The study applies a rolling sampling method, using a national database listing all Dutch childcare provisions (at the centre level) as its population. A random sample of different forms of early care and education provisions is drawn every year following a stratified sampling model based on region of the country, degree of urbanisation and size of the organisation. These annual samples result in a large, nationally representative sample over the consecutive years. In the sample up to 2022, $N = 659$ centres are included. The results are based on more than 3500 live observation measures (i.e., CLASS – La Paro et al., 2011; ERS – Harms et al., 1998, 2003), over 2500 observation measures using video recordings (i.e., NCKO-interactieschalen – Fukkink et al., 2013) and more than 1500 surveys completed by staff working directly with children as well as centre managers. Approximately half of the data is collected in centre-based ECEC groups for 0–4 year-olds. The other half consists of centre-based after-school care for 4-12 year olds and home care provisions for 0–12 year-olds.

Selected Findings: The average emotional process quality (i.e., interaction quality of teachers) is considered good. The average educational process quality is considerably lower and considered as mediocre according to the benchmarks of the instrument. A comparison of the care pre and post COVID shows a stable process quality with a small increase in some areas. The governmental effort to increase quality with the new legislation in 2018 (Wet IKK) is a likely explanation for this. Other quality aspects show a slight decrease after the COVID pandemic. This mostly related to the curriculum quality (the extent to which a variety of activities is provided and how the daily programme is structured) and the contact with parents. The pandemic and the increasing staffing shortages are likely explanations for this. Concerning the organisation quality, staff appear to be generally satisfied with their work; however, overall work stress has increased over the

past few years and centre managers also indicate an increase in experienced problems (mostly related to staffing shortage) to maintain their quality.

Implications: The studies suggest that the Dutch childcare system is under pressure. Nevertheless, the recent investments in the quality of the sector seemed to have paid off, especially with regard to process quality. Overall the slight increase in process quality despite the more complex working conditions is a compliment to the sector.

Organisation logics in relation to quality and inclusion

Sources: Romijn et al. 2023b (see *References* for full details)

Background: Research has extensively investigated the relationship between structural quality characteristics on the one hand and process quality on the other hand. However, given limited variation in the Netherlands in structural characteristics (such as group size, staff to child ratios, education level) due to regulations, these characteristics do not sufficiently explain the large variance in process quality. In the current paper we adopt a configurational approach, arguing that organisations are more than just a sum of individual structural characteristics, and that differences we see in quality should raise the question whether some provisions have found more effective organisation forms than others when it comes to creating inclusive, high quality environments. This is especially relevant in the Dutch context, where the ECEC system can be considered hybrid in the sense that the public task of providing high quality early child care, including the reduction of inequalities and the prevention of early education gaps, is nowadays allocated to both private for-profit and not-for-profit organisations (Van der Werf, 2020).

Methods: We drew on data from centre-based ECEC provisions for 2–4 year-olds collected during the first three years (2017–2019) of the National Dutch Childcare Quality Monitor. A latent class analysis was performed on 14 dichotomised organisation characteristics (based on manager surveys) reflecting several organisational logics (i.e., market logic, corporation logic, community logic, profession logic). This led to three organisation profiles which were then compared in terms of quality (process, curriculum, structural) and inclusive practices.

Findings: Three types of organisations could be characterized; engaged professional organisations, commercial service-oriented corporations, and traditional bureaucratic organisations. The engaged professional organisations outperformed the other two types in terms of quality and inclusion. These organisations are considered engaged in the sense that they show a strong connection with their community. They actively reach out to parents, engage in partnerships with local organisations (i.e., schools, community services), and have a clear social mission. They can also be considered professional organisations as they try to create communities of practice and support teachers in their continuous and team-based professional development. Also, professionals and managers are more interconnected as they show lower scores on the corporation logic. Though these organisations are not characterised by strong profit goals or client-centred flexibility, they can be for-profit legal entities and endorse a relatively strong service-oriented profile. In conclusion, they have an eye for the quality of their work (professional logic) and the public goal of childcare to fulfil a meaningful role in the community (community logic), while not losing sight of their position in the market and addressing parents' needs for flexibility (market logic).

Implications: This study stressed the importance of the organisation climate when it comes to practices in classrooms. More specifically, it shows that a strong support for professionalism (i.e., investing in staff and their skills) in the whole organisation and a more interconnected workplace can have a positive impact on children's day to day experience.



Social life of young children and pedagogical innovations

Sources: Singer 2016; Singer and Wong 2019 (see *References* for full details)

Background: Researching peer relations of under 3 year-olds in group settings emerged as a new phenomenon in the 1970s and 1980s and a common focus of educators tended to be peer conflict. A widespread assumption at the time was that only adults – especially mothers – constitute the meaningful environment of infants and toddlers. Related to the rise of children’s centres, researchers in diverse countries carried out explorative studies of groups dynamics among young children and caregivers/pedagogical workers; also in the Netherlands (Singer and De Haan 2007).

Methods: Observation studies with focussed video recordings in natural group situations in children’s centres for under 4 year-olds and interviews with pedagogical workers and parents. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were used.

Studies were conducted on early social and moral learning in interaction with peers in childcare centres: on how young children make contact and create togetherness; humour in young children and how they make fun and jokes together; conflicts in young children, peace-making and co-construction of social and moral rules; friendship and factors that predict friendship among very young children (Singer and de Haan 2007). In these studies, the impact of peer behaviour and strategies of the pedagogical worker were analysed and discussed with the involved pedagogical workers.

Selected Findings: For instance, the studies of peer conflicts showed that children’s interest in the continuation of joint play is the strongest incentive to use bilateral and prosocial strategies. But Dutch educators often focused on the (alleged) perpetrator of the conflict.

Implications: The study suggests that teachers should value and support peer relations rather than focusing on the perpetrators in conflict situations (Singer, van Hoogdalem, de Haan and Bekkema 2012). Based on these studies, training programmes were constructed, evaluated and implemented.

10. Workforce challenges – country expert assessment

The following workforce challenges are emerging in the field of early childhood education and care in the Netherlands.

Professionalisation: investing in interdisciplinary skills

Coordination between childcare and the pre-primary education system is a topical social issue in the Netherlands; both sectors are currently searching for appropriate forms in terms of organisational governance and pedagogical practice. The current focus of interest is on how professionals from different organisations with their respective specialisms can best work together in a coordinated way (Doornenbal et al. 2017). As indicated above, the differences in regulations, employment conditions and salaries of staff in the childcare, education and youth health care sectors form an obstacle to cooperation.

Investing in professional networks in ECEC practice

The continuing professional development of ECEC staff is currently provided in a course-based format. Other formats may complement this approach. For example, team intervision, supervision, and learning communities are promising complementary approaches for ECEC. Also the

“(academic) workplaces” (a form of learning communities) that already exist for teachers of primary and secondary schools in different places, may offer opportunities for professional development (Kinderopvang werkt! 2022/n.d. c).

This challenge will become even more urgent if the Dutch ECEC workforce becomes more diverse with professionals at ISCED levels 3, 4 and 5/6 and with professionals from childcare, education and youth care. Interdisciplinary networks may support interprofessional practice and collaboration (type 1: multidisciplinary networks), but also key stakeholders from different teams may organise meetings in (peer) supervision groups (type 2: mono-disciplinary specialist networks).

Evidence-informed practice and practitioner research

Scientific research has shown that not all pre- or in-service interventions for ECEC staff are (equally) effective (Egert, Fukkink, and Eckhardt 2018; Werner et al. 2016). Moreover, there are many training modules in the field; however, solid proof for their effectiveness is scarce. It is vital for future professional development that innovative practices are developed and evaluated. Mixed methods evaluation in controlled experimental designs may be helpful in charting the different learning experiences and learning gains, but also pitfalls of the different stakeholders (NCKO 2017).

Practitioners’ research is also under development. Pedagogical coaches and staff at Bachelor's level have a stimulating influence in this. Childcare organisations and schools can tackle urgent issues within their organisation. The impact of practitioners’ research in collaboration with universities of applied sciences and universities is promising (Doornenbal and Kassenberg 2022; Tajik and Singer 2018).

Research into innovation at national and international level

In the Netherlands there is no organisation that can play a leading role in innovation with regard to all sectors involved in early education. The organisations involved in innovation and quality assurance are fragmented and compete with one another. The childcare sector and early education sector are the responsibility of different ministries and systems of inspection. Innovation and professional development in the childcare sector are steered by market forces. Employers are obliged to meet the quality requirements, but are free in the design: regarding the fees, they can stick to the minimum or provide extras if the parents want to pay more. Universities compete for government grants. Moreover, papers on the results of research written in Dutch and accessible for practitioners are not counted as scientific products. This has a negative impact on collaborative research between practitioners and academics (Singer and Wong 2019).

Dutch organisations that offer continuing professional development courses are also steered by the market system. They have to compete in securing assignments. Some of the big non-profit childcare companies do invest substantially in quality evaluation and the coaching of Pedagogical Workers. But it is not the prime task of these companies to invest in the improvement of pedagogical quality of children’s centres in general. For example, no company ever pays for their pedagogical counsellors to participate in international conferences. Dutch representatives of the early education and childcare sectors rarely participate in international organisations like OMEP (*Organisation Mondiale pour l’Éducation Préscolaire*) or international research conferences such as EECERA (European Early Childhood Education Research Association).

Nonetheless, there is a strong ECEC research tradition in the Netherlands. Although research groups have to compete for funding, the government funds ECEC research on a regular basis. Funding opportunities include initiatives to monitor the status quo of the quality of the system



since the early 2000's (e.g., research of Fukkink et al. 2013; Romijn et al. 2023a) to study explanatory factors in differences in quality (e.g., research of Slot et al. 2023a) or to inform the government about system reforms (e.g., research of Leseman et al. 2021). In addition, the research groups on ECEC have strong international connections on the topic. The Netherlands often collaborates in European projects (e.g., Horizon2020) on ECEC quality and is an active member of the research associations connected to the field (EECERA; EARLI, specifically the SIG5 – Learning and Development in Early Childhood).

Reducing staff shortages

Severe staff shortages continue to be a huge challenge for the childcare sector in the Netherlands and suggestions for reducing these are not fully convincing. One is extending the government measure allowing for half of all childcare workers in a setting to be student workers. Instead of concluding in July 2022 this measure has now been extended to July 2024, which means that the composition of the workforce in childcare centres will continue to be unbalanced, with inevitable effects on the quality of relationships. Another is reducing the staff to child ratio – which does not bode well for the individual and small group work needed in a high quality childcare environment. A further suggestion is to give discounts for enrolling on Wednesdays and Fridays, when parents usually work part-time, but this also falls short of expectations for a full-time, accessible system for working parents. More innovative is a proposal at ministerial level to incorporate qualified newcomers to the Netherlands into the childcare sector, including recently arrived persons with valid refugee status and Ukrainian refugees, who can work in reception centres with children and parents speaking other languages (The Holland Times 2022).

At the end of the day, however, what is really needed is not only substantial investment but a reconceptualisation of the system as a whole and not a piecemeal, incremental approach.

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